POL S G6210: Theories & Debates in American Politics  
Thursdays 2:10-4:00pm, Fall 2012  
(revised version: Sept. 26, 2012)

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Office hours: Wed. 4:10-5:00pm

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Office hours: by appointment

This graduate student field survey provides an overview of the scholarly study of American politics. The course has been designed for students who intend to specialize in American politics, as well as for those students whose primary interests are comparative politics, international relations, or political theory, but who desire an intensive introduction to the “American” style of political science.

Course Requirements

Readings and discussion
The readings, though extensive and representative, are not comprehensive. The syllabus balances classics with other work representative of the best current research in the field. The class is conducted predominantly in a discussion format, although we will lecture on various topics. Sessions will aim to clarify and probe the puzzles, theories, methods, and evidence presented in the various texts and to assess the contributions they make to an understanding of American politics and the broader development of social and political science. Students are required to have completed the assigned weekly reading by each class and to arrive thoroughly prepared to contribute actively to all discussions. You should expect to be called on to discuss any reading in any session.

Assignments
All students will write two analytical papers and four response papers during the course of the semester. All papers must be typed (standard 12 pt. Times New Roman or equivalent), double-spaced, and single-sided. Use “parenthetical citation” (Erikson and Lax 2008, 435). As Erikson and Lax (2008, 435) say, “use parenthetical notation.”

The analytical papers are generally six pages. You must choose which two weeks you will write the papers for at the start of the semester. The purpose of these papers is not to determine whether you have completed and understood the readings. Rather, they are assigned to help you develop your skills in the art of scholarly argumentation. It is thus vital that you not waste space or time summarizing the works. What you should do is critically analyze one or more of the week’s readings from the perspective of theory, logic, design, method, or evidence, assessing conclusions, relationships to other works, or contribution to the development of political science. You should stake out a coherent position clearly and forcefully in the first paragraph, then press it relentlessly forward in every subsequent sentence. Papers that fail to develop a forceful, compelling argument will receive a poor mark. They should be carefully edited, tightened, and revised. They do not demand reading or research beyond the week’s assignments. When in doubt, substitute more thinking for additional reading or writing.
One copy of the paper is due in Professor Lax’s mailbox at noon on Thursday for the material to be discussed later in the day (late papers will not be accepted except by specific arrangement in advance). You should also send an electronic copy to both of us (again by noon). We will write comments on the papers along with a preliminary grade and return them to you (usually) the following Thursday, so that you can revise the paper. Revised papers are due one week after the first draft is returned (this means you will usually have a paper due two weeks after the first draft is due, which you should consider when signing up for particular topics). You must include the original graded copy when turning in the revision.

The **response papers** are one to two page papers briefly responding to or analyzing some aspect of that week’s reading that caught your attention. These short papers should raise potential issues for our class discussion or address (albeit briefly) the same types of issues one might analyze in a longer paper. They need not be quite as formal as the analytical papers, but should still be clear, on topic, and professional. These papers will not receive full grades, but rather be graded on the “check” system. Two copies, one for each of us, are due at noon on Thursday the day of class (electronically by noon and in hard copy by 2pm). Students will be randomly assigned four weeks for which to write response papers based on their choices for the analytical papers.

**Grading**
Course grades will reflect effort and performance in class discussions and papers.

**Class Schedule**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 6</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Sept. 13</td>
<td>I. Public Opinion</td>
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<td>Sept. 20</td>
<td>II. Political Participation</td>
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<td>Sept. 27</td>
<td>III. Voting and Elections</td>
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<td>Oct. 4</td>
<td>IV. Interest Groups &amp; Parties</td>
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<td>Oct. 11</td>
<td>V. Courts</td>
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<td>Oct. 18</td>
<td>VI. Congress</td>
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<td>Oct. 25</td>
<td>VII. Presidency</td>
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<td>Nov. 1</td>
<td>VIII. Bureaucracy</td>
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<td>Nov. 8</td>
<td>IX. Amer. Pol. Development (APD)</td>
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<td>Nov. 15</td>
<td>X. State and Local Politics</td>
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<td>Nov. 22</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>Nov. 29</td>
<td>XI. System Performance</td>
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<td>Dec. 6</td>
<td>XII. “The Cutting Edge”</td>
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Readings

I. Public Opinion

Required:


Recommended:


II. Political Participation

Required:

• Wattenberg, Martin. 2002. Where Have All the Voters Gone? Harvard University Press. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 8.

Recommended:

III. Voting and Elections

Required:

Recommended:


IV. Interest Groups and Political Parties

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


• Schelling, Thomas C.  “Hockey Helmets, Daylight Saving, and Other Binary Choices,”
  Publications.
  Cambridge University Press. Chapters 4 and 5.
• Snyder, James M. Jr., Michael M. Ting.  2002.  “An Informational Rationale for Political

V. Courts

*Required: (*** I am going to update these!!)**

• Segal, Jeffrey, and Harold Spaeth.  2002.  *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model
• Epstein, Lee, and Jack Knight.  1998.  *Choices Justices Make*. CQ Press. Preface and
  Chapters 1-3.
• Epstein, Lee, and Jack Knight.  2000.  “Field Essay: Toward a Strategic Revolution in
  Judicial Politics: A Look Back, A Look Ahead.”  *Political Research Quarterly*,
  53(3): 625-661. [Read up to page 641 and the Discussion, skim the material in
  between]
  Political Science*, (Forthcoming May), 2011  [sections 1 and 2, the rest is optional]
• Cameron, Charles M., Jeffrey A. Segal, and Donald Songer.  2000.  “Strategic Auditing
  in a Political Hierarchy: An Informational Model of the Supreme Court’s Certiorari
• Lax, Jeffrey R.  2007.  “Constructing Legal Rules on Appellate Courts: Median Rules
• Fischman JB, Law DS.  2009.  “What is judicial ideology, and how should we measure
  it?” *Journal of Law and Policy* 29:133.  [Introduction, Part I, Part II]

*Recommended:*

• Lax, Jeffrey R., and Kelly T. Rader.  2010.  “Legal Constraints on Supreme Court
  71-2 (April), 2010.  [also see response and rejoinder]
  Justice Blind when it Runs for Office?”  *American Journal of Political Science* 48:
  247-263.

VI. Congress

• Cox, Gary, and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2005. Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the US House of Representatives. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 10, and 11, or Chapters TBA – will be provided.

Recommended:

VII. Presidency

*Required:*

*Recommended:*
• Shapiro, Robert, Martha J. Kumar, and Lawrence R. Jacobs eds. *Presidential Power*. Columbia University Press. Conclusion, any essays in Part 4 or Chapter 5 as per your interests.

VIII. Bureaucracy

*Required:*

**Recommended:**

**IX. American Political Development and Analytic Political History**

*Required:*

Recommended:
• Cameron, Charles. [chapter in Katznelson volume]

X. State and Local Politics

Required:
Recommended:


XI. System Performance

Required:


Recommended:

- Krimmel, Kate, Jeffrey R. Lax, and Justin H. Phillips. “Gay Rights in Congress: Public Opinion and (Mis)Representation”

XII. “The Cutting Edge”: Money and Representation

*Required:*


• Schlozman, Verba, and Brady. Participation book. Chapters: TBA.

• Bhatti, Yosef, and Robert Erikson. *How Poorly are the Poor Represented in the US Senate?* (in *Who Gets Represented?*, Peter Enns and Christopher Wlezien, eds) – PDF to be provided.

*Recommended:*


*General Background Reading*: *Political science, history and “isms”:*


Availability of Readings

The following books have been ordered at Book Culture (536 West 112th Street, next to the post office, east of Broadway). They can also be purchased used or new online. Required readings have been placed on reserve in Lehman Library. You may make “fair use” copies if you desire. The articles can be found at www.jstor.org or through the Columbia libraries e-journals link.